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USF launches Honors College

Thanks to the efforts of Stuart Silverman, his staff and university administrators, USF will open its new Honors College this fall.

To get the college off the ground, the university’s Board of Trustees approved the concept, along with an initial $60,000 in funding, on March 21 at USF St. Petersburg. Silverman, now interim dean of the college, believes it is the natural evolution of the Honors Program, a course of scholarly and social experiences for students who have demonstrated academic excellence at the high school and undergraduate levels. The Honors Program began in 1983 with 20 freshmen. In 2001, the program welcomed 380 new freshmen and 39 transfer students. Enrollment is projected to grow from 1,300 students to 2,000 within five years.

The benefits of inclusion are obvious. There is an Honors residence hall (Epsilon), where Tom Kane, director of Housing, "makes sure that there is special programming for these students," Silverman said.

Students also benefit from an Honors lounge, a computer lab and a variety of social activities, including picnics, parties and dances. Some students perform in a 35-member musical group dubbed the Honors Philharmonic Orchestra, which plays at various Honors ceremonies.

"I call them the Rubber Band, because they have learned to be so flexible," Silverman said, with a grin. Although the idea for a formal Honors College has existed for several years, the university already had New College. After New College became the state’s 11th university, President Judy Genshaft increased her efforts to create the Honors College. "President Genshaft is interested in establishing an Honors College as a symbol of the university’s desire to provide the highest quality education to undergraduates," Silverman said.

He also credits Provost David Stamps and Dean Robert Sullivan. "Both Provost Stamps and Dean Sullivan have shown tireless dedication to the project," Silverman said. "They embody the spirit of excellence that the Honors College is prepared to offer its undergraduates."

Students in Honors work through an interdisciplinary curriculum that results in each participant writing an Honors thesis. The college will offer more rigorous courses of study, and, as a college, will confer diplomas on graduates who complete a research-oriented degree program.

"We envision that degrees offered by the Honors College will be individually tailored to the academic interest of each student and, depending upon the discipline, would be heavily oriented toward research, scholarship or performance," Silverman explained.

The college will maintain a relationship with the Office of Undergraduate Research. Interim Associate Dean Georg Kleine will find any undergraduate who wants research experience a project to work on, Silverman said. "Students under the direction of faculty mentors participate in scholarly research," he said. "We draw upon faculty universitywide and in all academic colleges, as well as (Louis de la Parte) Florida Mental Health Institute and the colleges of Medicine, Public Health and Architecture."

Faculty mentors, who already play an important role in the Honors Program, will see enhanced and expanded opportunities for mentorship. Silverman said. Students can be assisted in achieving several prestigious scholarships, including the Rhodes and the Truman. Donna Cohen, a faculty member at FMIH, has mentored students for about a year, with four of her students applying for the Marshall Scholarship.

Silverman attributes the program’s remarkable growth to receiving the resources necessary to offer services to the students. The best faculty at the university are always available to teach and mentor. "These faculty members give more of their time, skills and effort than anybody could expect," Silverman said.

Silverman has invested countless hours into the program. "Dr. Silverman has been a mentor and friend to hundreds of Honors students over the years, said Sharon Geiger, the college’s adviser. "His cure and concern are the reasons that Honors has grown so rapidly. His leadership is outstanding."
Investigating a dead zone

Scientists at USF St. Petersburg and the Florida Marine Research Institute are studying a patch of so-called black water about the size of Lake Okeechobee, trying to explain the “dead zone” drifting in the Gulf of Mexico about 25 miles north of Key West, according to the March 23 St. Petersburg Times. A similar story also ran on the New York Times News Service, AP and UPI.

The organism called rhizosolenia is a cousin to Red Tide and has the potential to kill fish. USF Professor Frank Muller-Karger speculated that the patch of discolored water, which ranges from deep green to brown to black, is some leftover matter from Red Tide outbreaks. Last fall, a large and recurring outbreak of Red Tide seemed to germinate in the same area in which the black water patch began.

The black patch seems to be getting smaller and less concentrated, scientists said. It has moved very slowly over the past three months from the Charlotte Harbor area to the Florida Bay, Muller-Karger said.

The patch also doesn’t appear to be killing fish or other marine life yet.

Lessons for the ages

The College of Medicine’s new geriatric studies program was featured in the April 1 Tampa Tribune. USF medical students were stunned at the great shape that one of the 91-year-old patients, Theresa Mott, was in.

“I was amazed at the vitality we saw,” said student Bijal Shah, whose grandparents live in India. “Some of these people had a lot of conditions, but they were still running around doing things. I would never have expected that.”

“We’re trying to get them to see that older people are not all alike,” said Lori Roscoe, assistant professor for curriculum and medical education, who helped create the program. “You could have one 85-year-old in a nursing home and another jumping out of airplanes.”

Hungry for fast food

Checkers Drive-In Restaurants and other fast-food outlets that operate in the West Bank, Nablus and Bethlehem have been unable to stay open during the fighting there, reported the April 4 Tampa Tribune.

The restaurants were profitable, but have difficulty staying open where there’s always a threat of violence. USF Professor Abdelwahab Hechiche said that while residents strongly resent the United States, they have a strong desire for American culture. The lure of our culture often fascinates all humans, not just Americans, Hechiche said.

“People separate the human experience from politics,” Hechiche said. “There is something very desirable to humans about things American: fast food, jeans, music, even haircuts.”

Surgeon heads Physicians Group

Dr. Robert J. Belsole was appointed associate dean of Clinical affairs for the USF College of Medicine, and chief operating officer of the USF Physicians Group. College of Medicine Dean Robert M. Daugherty made the appointment effective March 1.

Belsole joined USF as one of its founding faculty in orthopedics in 1977, and is now professor and director of the Division of Orthopedic Surgery.

“Dr. Belsole has been a strong and active leader in the management of the practice plan, and in several of its governance committees,” Daugherty said. “He brings experience and understanding of how the practice of medicine relates to teaching and research. And he understands our affiliated teaching hospitals.”

A well-known authority on hand surgery, Belsole’s research has been in constructing models of the hand and wrist to aid in reconstruction and treating nerve compression syndromes. He has taught clinical anatomy of the hand for first-year students.

He has directed the USF/Tampa General Hospital Hand and Microsurgical Postgraduate Fellowship program since 1985. The program has trained more than 30 surgeons who practice throughout the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

A New Yorker, Belsole earned his medical degree from New York Medical College, with residencies at New York University-Bellevue Hospitals.

Health care services increase for Polk’s low-income residents

More health care is available for Polk County’s senior citizens in the indigent category, according to Alice Murray, USF Lakeland assistant dean, and Rosemarie Lann, interdisciplinary social science professor.

Their research focuses on the needs of the county’s elder population in terms of health, well-being, mental status and ethnic needs.

Most of the information was gathered at last year’s Senior Health and Fitness Expo from a questionnaire filled out by participants. Questions about ethnic background, health status, area of residency, services used in illness, income and employment status aided researchers in drawing specific conclusions about the area.

“There is a section of those in the gray area, income-wise, who have needs currently not being met,” Lann said. “With the information we have gathered, we hope to remediate this situation somewhat.”

From the 350 surveys, the researchers learned that the average age of seniors in the Polk County area is 75 with an average rate of 2.5 illnesses a year. When ill, most see physicians as opposed to going to health-care facilities or physical therapists.

The information was presented at the Society for Applied Anthropology meeting in March.

After presenting their findings, the research team hopes to acquire a grant to continue analyzing the elderly’s needs and assist them in establishing an aging services center in Polk County.

by Brenna Smith